PD 83/86

THE REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY OF WATERLOO

COMMISSIONER OF PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

TO: Chairman Brian Turnbull and Members of the Regional Planning and Development Committee

DATE: Tuesday May 6, 1986

SUBJECT: REPORT ON REGIONAL SUBDIVISION ACTIVITY DECEMBER 31, 1985

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Regional Municipality of Waterloo receive for information, Report PD 83/86 entitled "Report on Regional Subdivision Activity - December 31, 1985".

SUMMARY:

This report analyses the availability of land for development in registered, draft approved and pending plans of subdivision as of December 31, 1985. It compares the current supply with that of previous years.

In summary, the land supply for residential development in registered and draft approved plans is lower for December, 1985 than December 1984 because of the large number of building permits issued, construction at less than the maximum density and revisions to plans to resubdivide multiple blocks and semi-detached lots for single family lots. (Figure 5).

The number of building permits issued for single family dwellings in the Region of Waterloo in 1985 was an all time high. It exceeded the previous high in 1975 by 105 units. In response to the unprecedented demand for single family lots, semi-detached lots have been used for single family units and multiple blocks resubdivided. In registered plans in 1985, the land supply was reduced by an estimated 561 units because of resubdivision and construction at less than the maximum density. In addition, revisions to draft approved and pending plans reduced the development potential by a further 412 and 370 units respectively.

In response to the increased demand for lots, the development industry submitted 27 new plans in 1985 compared with 7 plans in 1984. In the first quarter of 1986 a further 13 plans have been submitted.

REPORT:

Introduction

This annual report is based on the Development Log which is updated three times annually, once at the end of April, August and December. Copies of the Development Log, the detailed computerized unit count for all registered, draft approved and pending plans of subdivisions, are available upon request from the Regional Planning and Development Department. Status of Plans maps for each Area Municipality are also available from the Cartographic Section of the Department.

Analysis and Conclusions

Registered Plans:

In the Regional Municipality of Waterloo, the vacant land supply in registered plans for all types of residential units as of December 31, 1985 was 14,644. (Table 1). This represents a decline of 1,306 units from the December 31, 1984 total of 15,950. This decline of available units is double the decline from December 31, 1983 (16,557) to the December 31, 1984 total. In the preceding two years the available supply of residential units has declined 1,913 units. (Figure 2). The predominant reasons for this decline are the increased building activity in the Region, builders not building to the maximum density on each lot or block and resubdivision of multiple blocks to permit single family units.

This decline occurred despite the registration of 2,209 units in 34 plans in 1985; whereas in 1984, 872 units in 17 plans and in 1983, 256 units in 3 plans were registered. Only one plan registered was for industrial purposes and the predominant new residential land supply is for single family and semi-detached dwellings. (Figure 2).

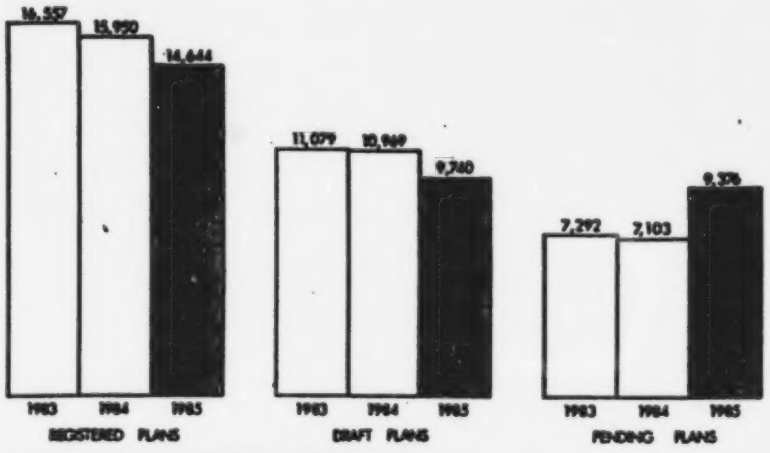
The Townships of Woolwich and Wellesley in 1985 had a minimal decline in available residential units; while Wilmot and North Dumfries had minimal gain. The most significant decline was in the City of Kitchener where the decline was almost 1,000 units. The City of Waterloo declined 190 units and the City of Cambridge declined 116 units. (Figure 3). These declines occurred despite the registrations of new residential units.

Draft Approved Plans:

The total number of residential units in draft approved plans of subdivision decreased by 1,229 units from the December 31, 1984 total of 10,969 to the December 31, 1985 total of 9,740 units (Figure 1). The December 31, 1983 total was 11,079 residential units. All municipalities had a decline except the Township of Woolwich which showed a moderate gain (Figure 3). The reduction of units is reflected in the number of units registered in 1985. Despite that almost twice as many units were draft approved in 1985 as in 1984. During the year the Regional Municipality of Waterloo gave extensions to draft approval for 71 plans of subdivision; whereas in 1984, 62 plans were extended. It should be noted that all plans processed under the 1983 Planning Act do not require extensions of draft approval as there is no automatic lapsing provision. No requests for extensions were refused by the Area Municipalities or the Region during the year.

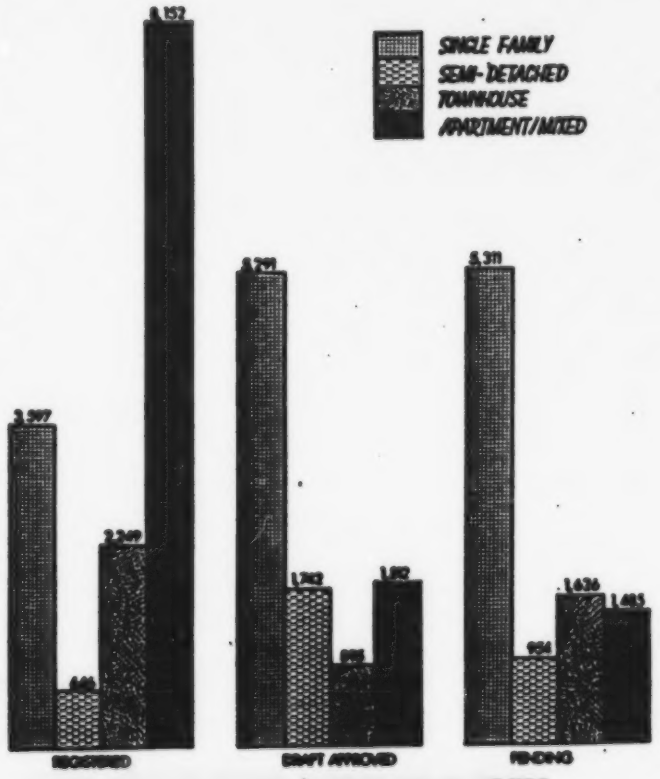
For the year 1985, 15 plans received draft approval containing 1,392 residential units; this compares with 13 plans containing 707 residential units in 1984 and 12 plans with 553 units in 1983. Again, the predominant type of units within draft approved plans is for single family or semi-detached development (Figure 2). Of the 15 plans that received draft approval in the year, one was for commercial and two were for industrial development.

FIGURE 1



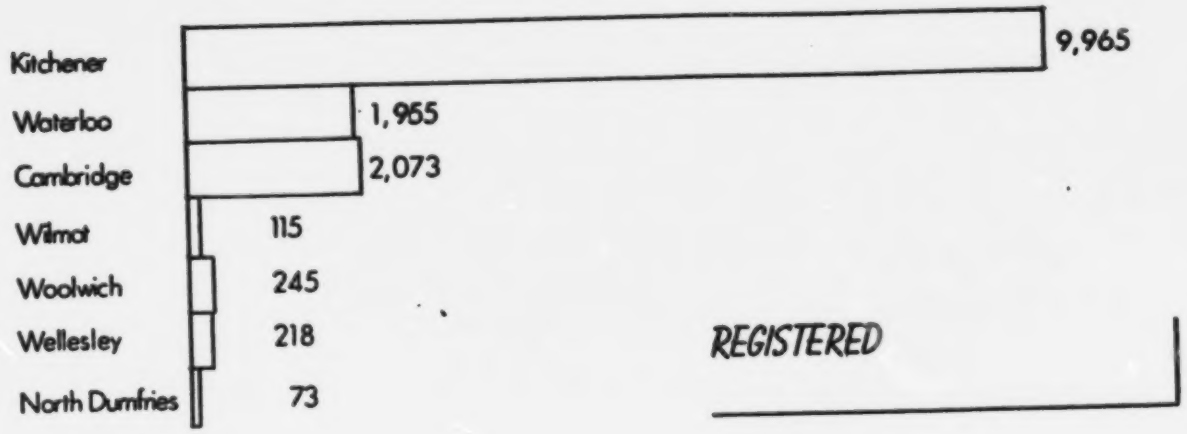
REGIONAL SUBDIVISION INVENTORY OF UNBUILT UNITS

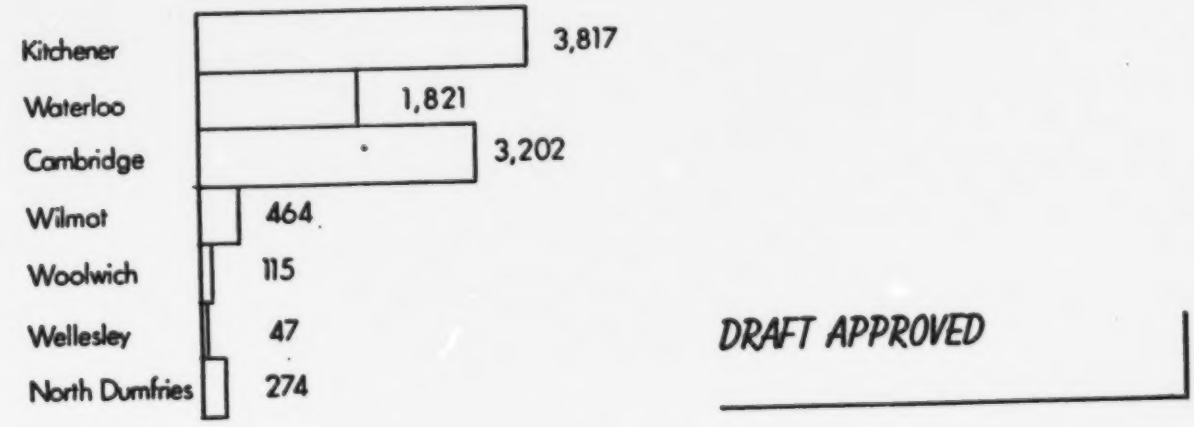
REGIONAL TOTAL AS OF DECEMBER 31 FOR EACH STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT.

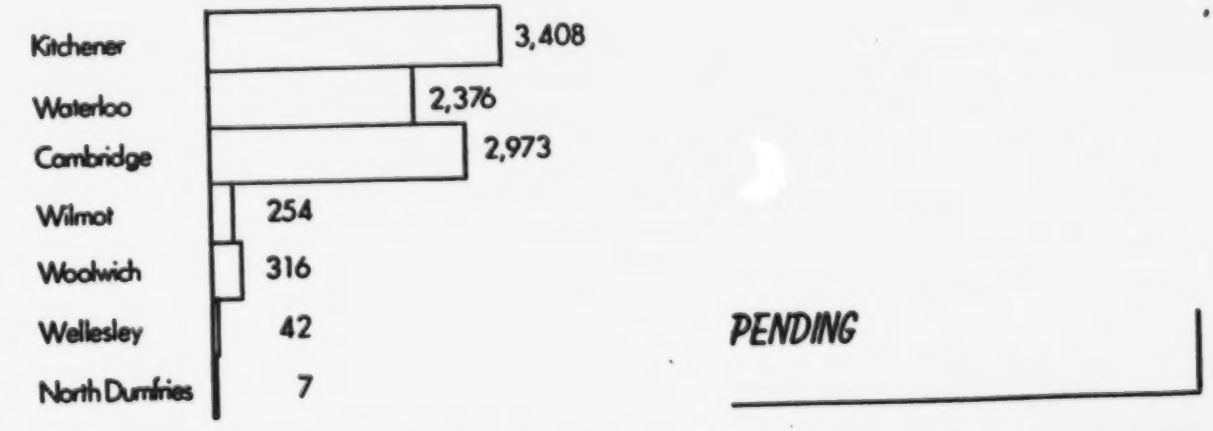


REGIONAL SUBDIVISION INVENTORY OF UNBUILT UNITS BY UNIT TYPE
AS OF DECEMBER 31, 1985.

FIGURE 2







REGIONAL SUBDIVISION INVENTORY OF UNBUILT UNITS FOR EACH MUNICIPALITY BY STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT AS OF DECEMBER 31, 1985

FIGURE 3

Pending Plans:

Within pending plans of subdivisions in the Regional Municipality of Waterloo the number of units has increased from 7,103 in 1984 to 9,376 in 1985. In 1983 the total number of units was 7,292. The trend in previous years was to have this supply decrease because of the reduced number of units being received in new plans and the rush to proceed to draft approval as quickly as possible. Whereas in 1984 the number of units decreased from the 1983 total by 821 units, in 1985 the number of units from the previous year increased by 2,273 units (Figure 1).

In 1985, 27 plans were received containing 4035 residential units. In 1984, 14 plans were received with 517 residential units and in 1983, 7 plans with 110 units were received. In the two previous years 7 plans were for commercial or industrial development while in 1985 only 1 plan was for industrial development. What makes this increase even more remarkable is that more units proceeded from pending to draft approval in 1985 than had in previous years.

Building Permits:

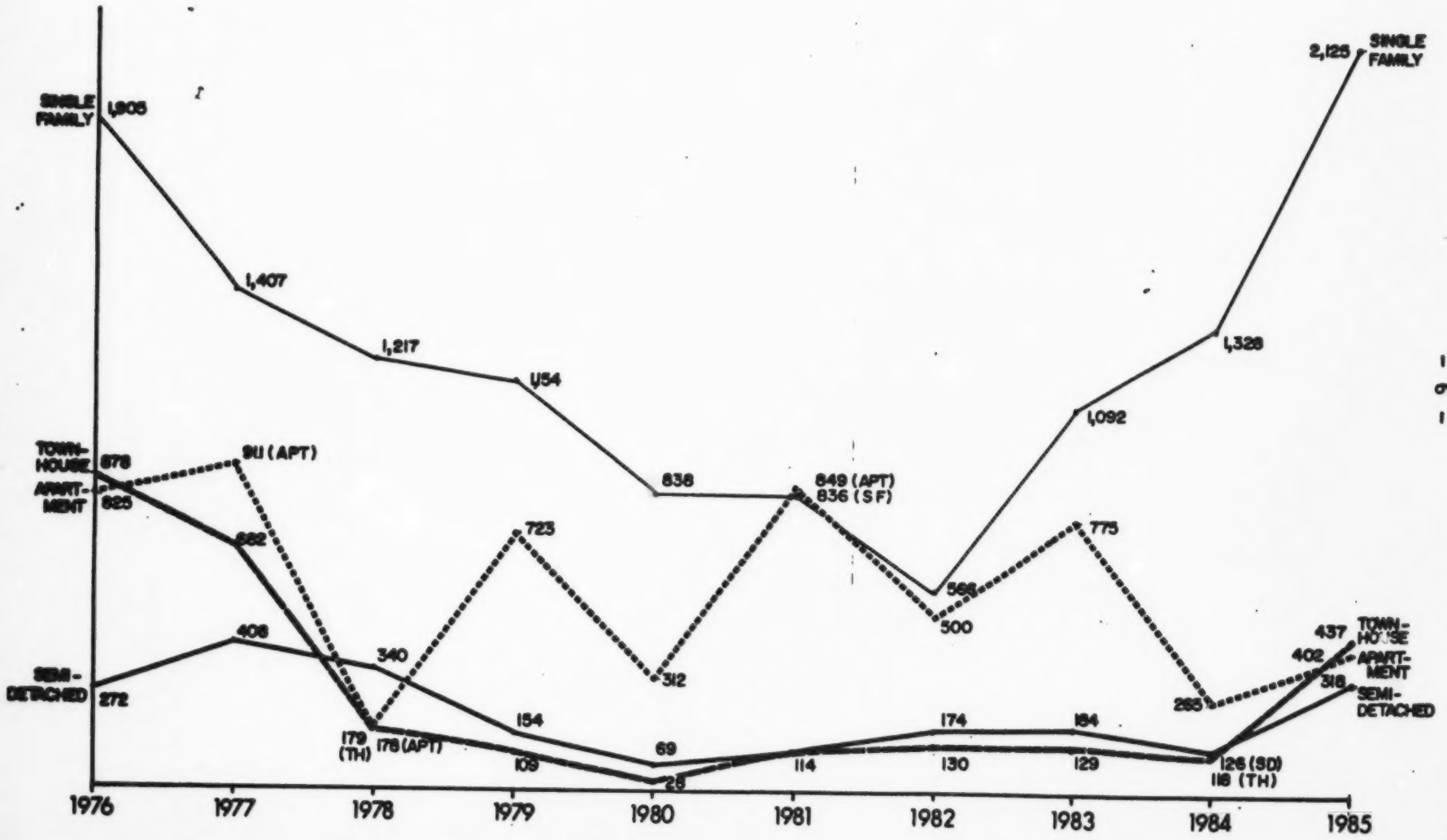
A total of 3,282 building permits were issued for new residential units in 1985, compared with 1,837 units in 1984 and 2,180 units in 1983. All unit types show an increase especially for single family dwellings. The number of building permits (2,125 units) issued in 1985 for single family dwellings exceeded the previous high in 1975 by 105 units. The number of permits for single family units has jumped from a 1982 low of 566 units (Table 1).

The total number of units for which building permits were issued in 1985 (3,282 units) does not match the records set in 1972 and 1983 of more than 5,600 units per year. This is because there has been a dramatic drop in the number of apartment units. In 1972 and 1983 building permits were issued for more than 2,700 apartment units each year. Apartment construction has been influenced by government assistance programs. During the 1980's construction has ranged from a high of 849 units in 1981 to a low of 265 units in 1984. In 1985 permits were issued for 402 apartment units. These figures do not identify whether the project was to be a condominium or developed under a program for a special group (ie. seniors).

The Subdivision Activity Report provides a snapshot of activity within the Regional Municipality of Waterloo at a given point in time. Within the year many changes can occur within each stage of development as it affects each plan.

Of the 27 new plans received in 1985, 7 received draft approval and an additional 5 will receive draft approval in early 1986. Of the 7 that received draft approval, 2 were completely registered and 2 more had a phase registered in 1985. One file was closed at the request of the applicant. In 1984, of the 14 plans received, 8 were draft approved and 2 of the 8 were registered.

FIGURE 4



TOTAL BUILDING PERMITS ISSUED BY HOUSING TYPE. REGION OF WATERLOO

TABLE 1

BUILDING PERMITS BY TYPE OF DWELLING UNIT

REGION

YEAR	SINGLE DETACHED	SEMIS/ DUPLEX	ROW	APARTMENT	TOTAL NUMBER
1972	1995	440	452	2780	5667
1973	1713	420	812	2753	5697
1974	1293	412	907	957	3565
1975	2020	392	908	1110	4430
1976	1905	272	878	825	3830
1977	1407	408	682	911	3408
1978	1217	340	179	178	1914
1979	1154	154	109	723	2140
1980	838	69	28	312	1247
1981	836	114	114	849	1913
1982	566	174	130	500	1370
1983	1092	184	129	775	2180
1984	1328	126	118	265	1837
1985	2125	318	437	402	3282

Highlights:

The analysis of the residential land supply is sumarized in Figure 5. The major factors affecting the land supply are building permits issued, density reductions and new submissions and/or approvals.

For Registered Plans, despite the registration of 2,209 new units in 1985, the number of building permits (2,954 units) and reductions in density (561 units) resulted in a net loss of land supply for units as of December 31, 1985.

For Draft Approved Plans, despite the draft approval of 1,392 units in 1985, there was a net loss of land supply for units as of December 31, 1985 because of the large number of units registered (2,209 units) and density reductions (412 units).

For Pending Plans, the submission of plans containing 4,035 units in 1985 outweighed the loss of units at this stage of processing due to draft approval (1,392 units) and density reduction (370 units) for a net gain in units in pending plans.

Plans submitted in 1985 provided for more flexibility to permit the developer to respond to future market demands through the use of part lot control exemption by-law so that lot size could be finalized closer to sale and issuance of building permits.

Reduction of density was a factor on many applications considered in 1985 including resubdivision of multiple blocks, and redesign for single family instead of semi-detached lots or townhouse blocks. It appears from a recent article in the Globe and Mail - "Housing Sprawl/Out of Control" (see attached) that the trend toward single family lots is not unique to the Region of Waterloo.

DWS:bd

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Housing sprawl out of control

UNCONTROLLED SPRAWL spews out of the planning machine, aided and abetted by planners and local councils that don't dare pause for one moment to see what they're doing.

As in Thornhill. In 1976, a plan was adopted for the northwest quadrant of the community. (What was once a real place has been segmented among several political jurisdictions.) It was a traditional suburban plan calling for half the population to live in detached houses, 30 per cent in semi-detached houses and the rest in apartments. The population target was 75,000.

But the plan wasn't adhered to. As planners note in a report to this afternoon's meeting of York Regional Council, a raft of Official Plan amendments was passed in the intervening decade redesignating medium-density residential areas as low-density areas "to reflect a higher market demand for detached units." Quite simply, the original plan was abandoned in favor of even broader sprawl.

The projected population for the area is now 88,000; 70 per cent of residents will live in single-family houses, 10 per cent in semis and the rest in apartments. What seems like a small change has two significant consequences, one tangible but limited, the other more general and more worrisome.

To help make up for the people not accommodated in the 1976 plan, the planners suggest that land formally considered green and protected by the Parkway Belt designation be subdivided for housing. This land is known as the Uplands Golf Course, but if planners and developers have their way, it will be transmuted into subdivisions called something like Uplands Village, Shady Oak Estates, or Ye Olde Homes of Uplands. In short, Mortgage Meadow.

Thornhill residents have been fighting the development of Uplands for several years, and now we see why the development will proceed: everyone has been so profligate with densities in Thornhill in the past nine years that to rectify our sprawl we confound it with further spread. The folly of each individual wanting vast acreage to form a personal fiefdom finally reaches its absurd end: the very amenity people wanted to live beside (the golf course and its ravine) is gobbled up.

But the general trend is more worrisome than the loss of a few hectares of pleasant green. Low suburban densities have exceptionally high costs associated with them. In the Thornhill case, most of the land is designated at a maximun density of 23 units a hectare and will probably be built closer to 17 or 18. Public transit works reasonably well at a minimum of 35 units a hectare, and below that figure requires increasingly deep subsidies.

So Thornhill is being built in a way that will probably never be reasonably served by transit. No one would willingly pay the subsidies required and the spread is such that transit would not work well. This provides a major social mobility hurdle for those unable to drive because of age, disability or inability to afford a vehicle. To actually approve of such a community in the late twentieth century seems incredibly short-sighted.

The servicing costs of low-density communities are much higher on a per-unit basis, and that's true for fire and police services, streetcleaning, garbage collection and other good things local governments do.

Low densities are simply not cost-efficient, and they lead either to higher property taxes or services being abandoned. One hallmark of a well-built community is that it is sustainable in the long term. Suburbs aren't.

None of these larger problems are even alluded to in the reports before council. None of the provincial officials reached by the planners in the preparation of the report expressed any concerns about the larger picture or the more general issues the confirmation of lower densities entails.

Members of York Regional Council, if they run true to form, will approve the matter without debate. Who's minding the store? No one, when it comes to low-density suburbs.

Say goodbye to Uplands. Wipe tears as farmland gets gobbled up. Forward ho!

Globe & Mail
April 24/86